

Carousel fans like Dentzel, Pippin

Their merry mission is preserving classic rides

By [Jim Masilak](#) ([Contact](#)), Memphis Commercial Appeal
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First and foremost, the National Carousel Association's annual convention is about visiting -- and, if possible, taking a spin on -- some of the nation's biggest, oldest and grandest merry-go-rounds.

In choosing to base this year's convention in Memphis for the first time, the [NCA](#) also hopes to raise awareness about a pair of famous old structures that are facing an uncertain future.

While its 112-strong convention party is making side trips this week to Little Rock, St. Louis, Greenville, Miss., and Meridian, Miss., to see those cities' carousels, the NCA is taking a keen interest in a pair of Memphis icons: the [1909 Dentzel Grand Carousel](#) and (to a lesser degree) the Zippin Pippin roller coaster.

The NCA party will get an arm's-length view of both rides this afternoon when it tours Libertyland, which has been closed to the public since 2005.

"If nothing else, we're trying to demonstrate to the city of Memphis that there's still a lot of enthusiasm out there for antique carousels," said Don Largent, the NCA's convention chairman. "Our main goal is to help find a permanent home for the carousel, and hopefully one that's successful as far a moneymaker so they can maintain it well."

Since Libertyland closed, a grass-roots campaign to save the park and its assets has looked for ways to preserve both the carousel and roller coaster. The impending redevelopment of the Mid-South Fairgrounds, on whose grounds both rides are located, has lent even greater urgency.

The NCA agreed to come to Memphis specifically because of the uncertainty that surrounds the rides, both of which are on the [National Register of Historic Places](#).

"It's really telling that the national organization would choose Memphis for its nationwide conference," said County Commissioner Steve Mulroy, a leader of the Save Libertyland movement. "We certainly hope it raises awareness. ... This (convention) is a big deal because they understand how precious these things are."

Mulroy said he has been in talks with [Children's Museum of Memphis](#) chief executive officer Dick Hackett about the possibility of relocating both the Dentzel carousel and the Zippin Pippin across the fairgrounds.

It would cost about \$1 million to take the Zippin Pippin apart, move it and reassemble it, Mulroy said, and another \$250,000-\$500,000 to do the same with the grand carousel. Mulroy said money from a Tourism Development Zone at the fairgrounds could help fund the moves if they were part of a museum expansion.

"The idea of partnering with the museum and folding it into the overall fairgrounds plan is a worthwhile one," said Mulroy, who will address the NCA convention tonight at the Holiday Inn Select-Airport. "It's my hope that we'll be able to do that. Raising public awareness is part of that, which is why I'm glad (the NCA) is here."

-- Jim Masilak: 529-2311

National Carousel Association 2008 convention

Top executive: Bette Largent, president

Founded: 1973, in Sandwich, Mass.

Mission statement: "The NCA is devoted to the promotion of the appreciation, conservation and enjoyment of the art of the classic carousel. Primary goals include protecting operating carousels still in existence, providing restoration and historical information, and promoting awareness of this unique art form."

Online: nca-usa.org